

# The Greatest Wildlife Show on Earth







© Sam Stogdale

*It's Kenya's most famous wilderness. With good reason. The magical realm of the Mara literally seethes with wildlife. Renowned for the huge herds of elephant and buffalo that meander its plains, it's also famed for the fat pods of hippo that wallow in the mud-brown coils of its rivers.*

Enjoying an abundance of herbivores, the Mara makes the ideal hunting ground for Kenya's famous 'big cats' and hosts her largest population of lions. It also offers the best chance of spotting a leopard in the wild. Other predators include cheetah and spotted hyena. Other safari stars include the distinctive Masai giraffe, the denim-rumped topi, Coke's hartebeest, Grant's and Thomson's gazelle, zebra, impala, Kirk's dik-dik, bushbuck, waterbuck and red duiker. The Reserve also boasts plentiful Nile crocodile, monitor lizard, baboon, vervet, blue and red-tailed monkeys, nocturnal bush babies, and tree hyrax.



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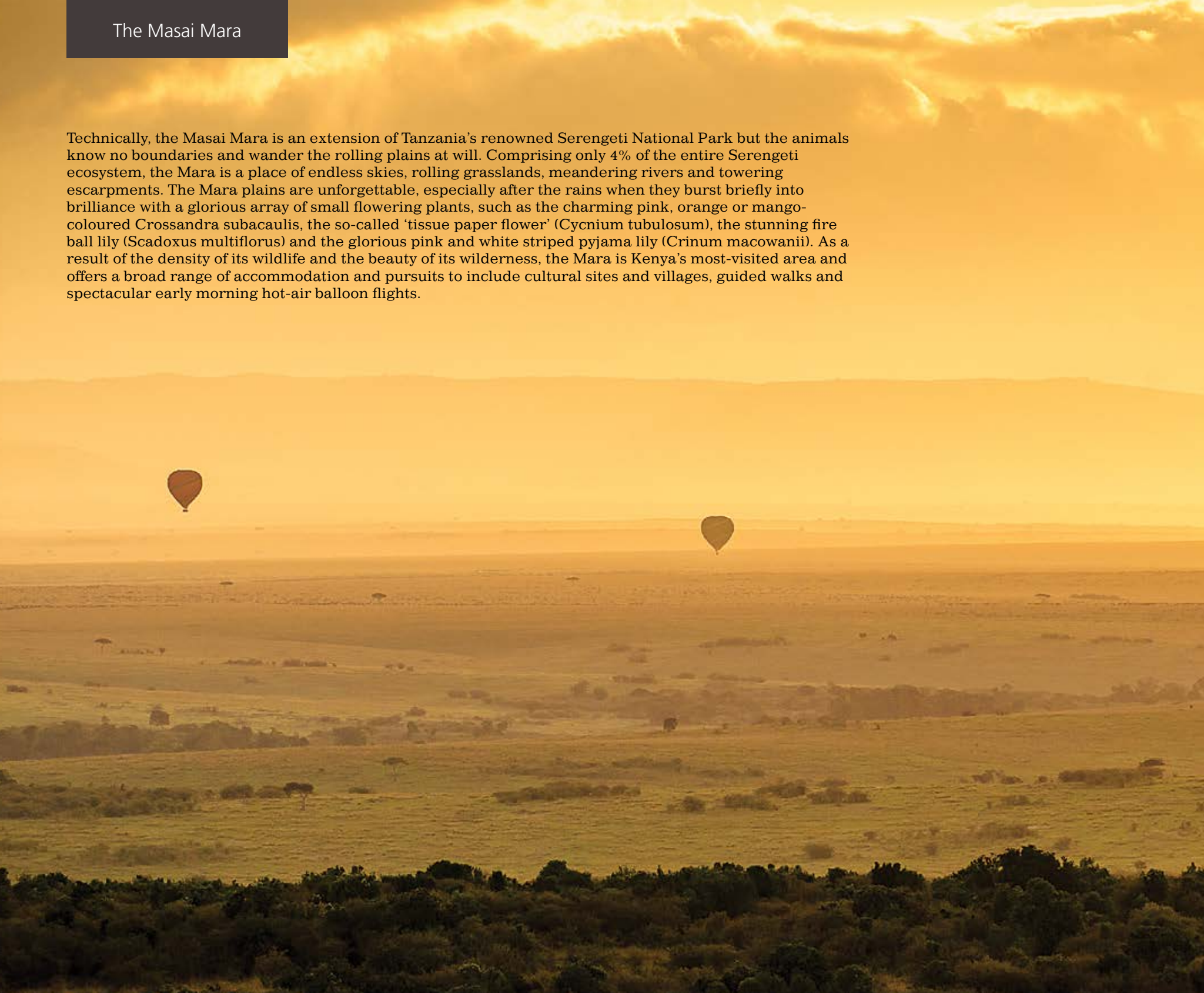


© Angama Mara

Agama Lizard  
© Angama Mara



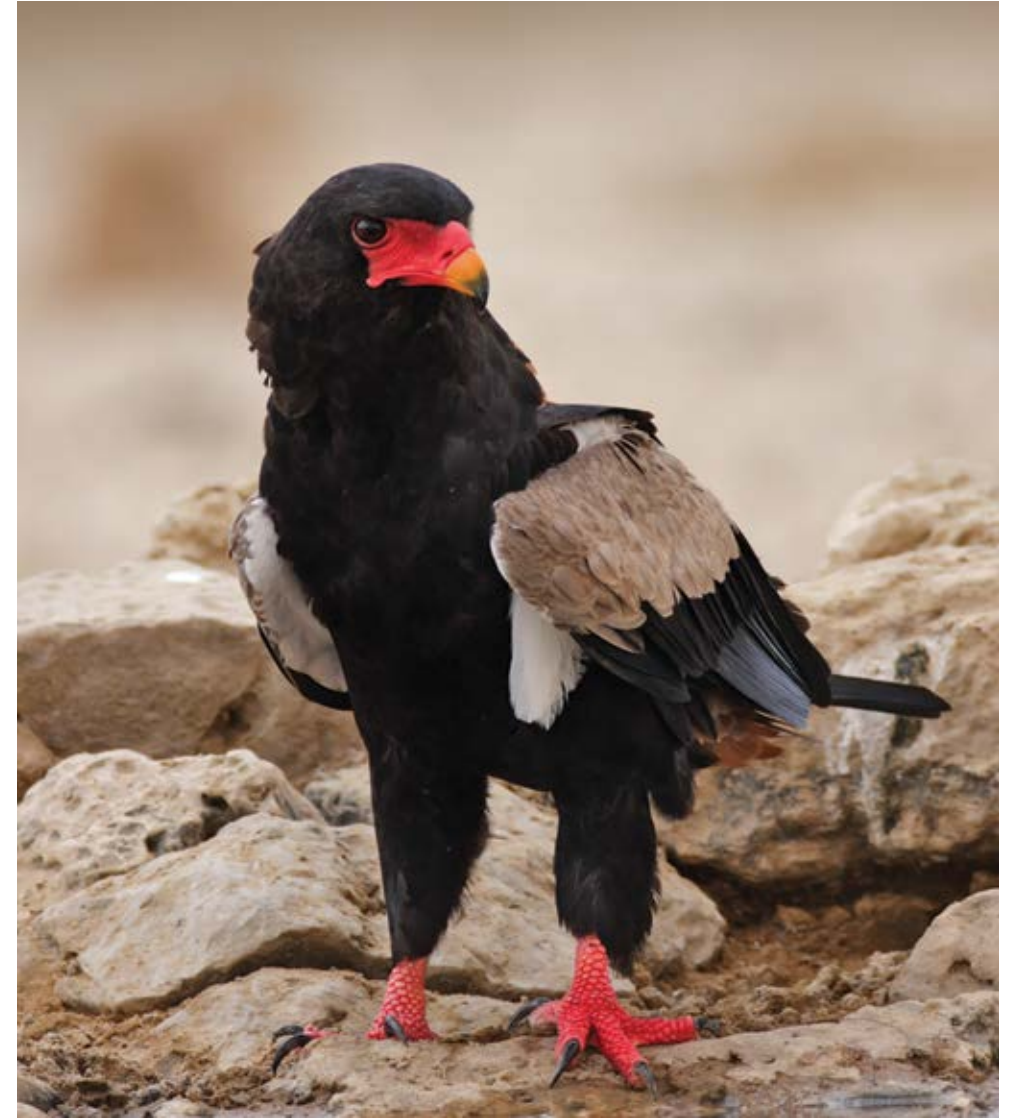
Technically, the Masai Mara is an extension of Tanzania's renowned Serengeti National Park but the animals know no boundaries and wander the rolling plains at will. Comprising only 4% of the entire Serengeti ecosystem, the Mara is a place of endless skies, rolling grasslands, meandering rivers and towering escarpments. The Mara plains are unforgettable, especially after the rains when they burst briefly into brilliance with a glorious array of small flowering plants, such as the charming pink, orange or mango-coloured *Crossandra subcaulis*, the so-called 'tissue paper flower' (*Cycnium tubulosum*), the stunning fire ball lily (*Scadoxus multiflorus*) and the glorious pink and white striped pyjama lily (*Crinum macowanii*). As a result of the density of its wildlife and the beauty of its wilderness, the Mara is Kenya's most-visited area and offers a broad range of accommodation and pursuits to include cultural sites and villages, guided walks and spectacular early morning hot-air balloon flights.



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Mahali Mzuri © Virgin Limited Edition



## Ornithologist's paradise

With over 550 resident and migratory species, the Mara shelters a unique selection of regionally- and globally-threatened birds. It also showcases 53 species of raptors, to include augur buzzard, black-shouldered kite, bateleur eagle and six species of vulture. Easily spotted on the plains are the common ostrich, secretary bird, ground hornbill and bustard (Kori, black-bellied and white-bellied). You'll also see plenty of crowned plover, red-necked spur fowl and helmeted guinea fowl, while along the rivers African fish eagle, Egyptian geese, yellow-billed stork, sacred ibis and blacksmith plover abound.

## Fact File

**Altitude:** 1,500-2,170 meters above sea level.

**Area:** 1, 672 sq km.

**Location:** Rift Valley Province, Narok and Transmara Districts.

Distance from Nairobi: 270 km.

**Climate:** the Mara has the highest rainfall (average 1000 mm pa) in the Serengeti-Mara ecosystem. Rain falls throughout the year but peaks in December, January and April.

**Vegetation:** comprises open rolling grassland, riverine forest, acacia woodland, swamps, non-deciduous thickets, and Acacia, Croton and Tarchonanthus scrub.

**Wildlife:** over 95 species of mammals.

**Birds:** more than 550 recorded species (5 globally threatened).





## *Let the show begin*

*Between the months of July and October one and a half million wildebeest, accompanied by vast numbers of zebra and gazelles make the long and dangerous trek from the drier lands in Tanzania, northwards to Kenya's Masai Mara. During the migration around 250,000 wildebeest and 30,000 zebra are killed as a result of predation by carnivores as well as from thirst, hunger, and exhaustion.*

*Photo: Paul Mckenzie*



# Cheetah *shower*

Shingo and her six cubs in the Masai Mara © Paul Mckenzie